

Physical Education Teachers are Inventing New Ways To Increase Physical Activity Among Children

Physical education teachers are stepping up to the plate to help increase physical activity among children by reinventing the concept of physical education. They say it is no longer about who is on what team or winning and losing but how much time children spend being physically active and learning to enjoy their physical activities.

VERB™, a national multicultural campaign sponsored by the U. S. Department of Health and Human Services' Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), encourages children to become physically active and has inspired teachers to add unique and new activities like rock climbing, juggling, and yoga to gain children's attention. The approach is so innovative that many are calling it the "New P.E."

"We are very much in favor of seeing physical education classes shift from the competitive sports-oriented model to a focus on leisure-time physical activities that will help kids develop a positive attitude toward physical activity for life," says Dr. Janet Collins, acting director, Division of Adolescent and School Health at the National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion for the CDC. "VERB has reached out to educators and now we are seeing that the New P.E. is getting more children involved in healthy physical activity."

New P.E. classes encourage children to get moving inside and outside of the classroom by giving them creative ideas for new activities. CDC studies have shown that participation in all types of physical activity declines as age or grade in school increases, and the New P.E. gives a hopeful outlook to halting this decline.

Some physical education teachers are making physical activity the core objective of their classes by reinventing games like tag football where the purpose of the game is to keep the players moving. In the new tag football, there are fewer players (four-on-four), no lines of scrimmage or quarterbacks, and players throw the ball only when they are tagged. If a pass is incomplete, the other team gets the ball. The original rules of the old tag football game were similar to a regular game of football, in which the players were stopped each time they were tackled. The new tag football game keeps the players continuously active until a player is tagged or scores.

Fewer than one in four children participate in 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity at least 3 days per week, and less than one in four get at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day.¹ As funding resources shrink, the New P.E. is gaining new respect for the importance of physical education classes and the role they can play in addressing critical issues, such as the obesity epidemic and unsatisfactory academic progress. One study found some evidence that participation in a 2-year health-related physical education program had several significant effects on academic achievement.²

The New P.E. aims to help decrease the overwhelming numbers of U.S. children who are overweight. Since 1980, the percentage of children who are overweight has more than doubled, to 15 percent.³ Children who are overweight are at greater risk for type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, and other health problems. Physical education redesigned with these new physical activities encourages children to be more creative in thinking of after-school activities that keep them moving. Teachers and parents can find new activities for children from resourceful Web sites such as the VERB campaign,

www.cdc.gov/VERB and www.VERBparents.com; National Association for Sport & Physical Education, www.NASPE.com; and PE Central, www.PECentral.com.

Experts recommend 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity every day, but only 6 percent of middle schools provide daily physical education classes throughout the school year to all of their students, and no federal laws require physical education to be included in public schools.⁴ Illinois is the only state that requires daily physical education for students in grades K-12.⁵ Therefore, the activities provided in programs such as the VERB campaign and New P.E. encourage children to become physically active in their free time away from their TVs and video games and give them alternative ways to have fun.

“It’s not about forcing our children to become more physically active,” Collins stresses. “It’s about making physical activity fun and an integral part of regular classroom and family activities.”

For More Information

The integrated **VERB™** campaign uses advertising, marketing, events, and partnership activities to ensure that campaign messages reach children whenever they are looking for something physical to do. Through multicultural media partnerships, the campaign is designed to reach children from all socioeconomic and ethnic backgrounds – including specific outreach for African Americans, Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders, Native Americans and Hispanics/Latinos.

For an overview of the VERB campaign, campaign activities, partners, physical activity resources, and the campaign press room and to look at the latest advertising, log on to www.cdc.gov/VERB.

Check out the tween Web site, www.VERBnow.com, to find cool activities, trendy games, and interesting activity tips. Also featured are fun polls and quizzes and a calendar of events. The activity finder is a great way to find places to get active in your community and discover new things to try. Tweens can also record their activity every day by using My VERB Recorder.

The VERB Web site, www.VERBparents.com, is a valuable resource for busy parents who want to learn more about the VERB campaign and the importance of physical activity. The site includes an activity finder for parents to learn about new activities and resources to locate those activities in their communities.

You can also visit Web sites for the National Association for Sport & Physical Education at www.naspe.org and the American Alliance for Health Education Recreation and Dance at www.aahperd.org for additional ideas about adding new physical activities to your life.

¹ International Life Sciences Institute. Improving Children's Health through Physical Activity: A New Opportunity, A Survey of Parents and Children about Physical Activity Patterns, 1997., Washington, DC.

² Sallis JF, McKenzie TL, Kolody B, Lewis M, Marshall S, Rosengard P., Effects of health-related physical education on academic achievement: project SPARK. Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport 1999;70(2):127-34.

³ Katherine M. Flegal, Margaret D. Carroll, Cynthia L. Ogden, and Clifford L. Johnson Prevalence and Trends in Obesity Among US Adults, 1999-2000 JAMA, Oct 2002; 288: 1723 - 1727.

⁴ School Health Policies and Programs Study, 2000. Journal of School Health, Volume 71, Number 7, September 2001.

⁵ National Association for Sport & Physical Education (NASPE). Shape of the Nation Report, 2001. Reston, VA: National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2002.